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Black Rage II

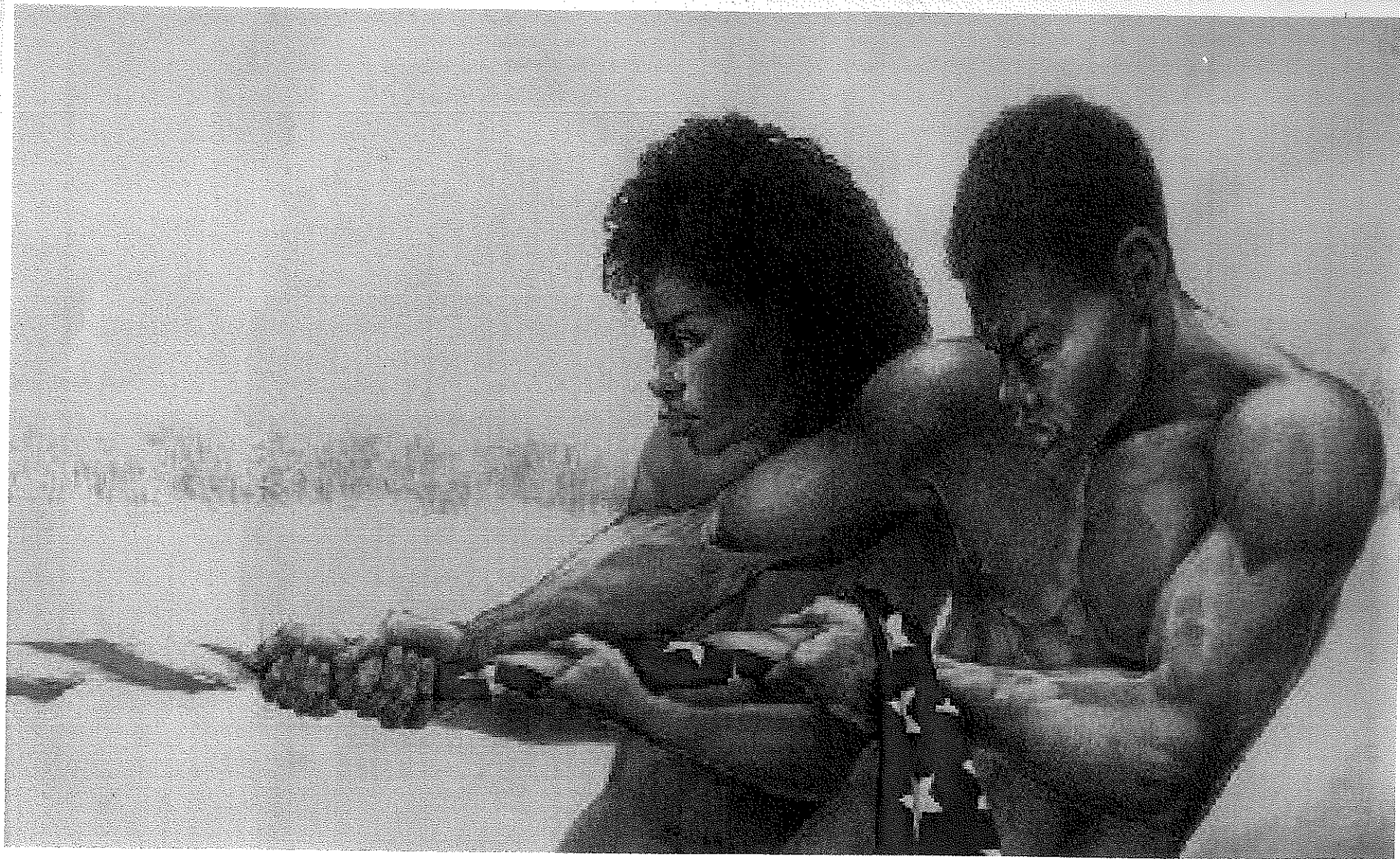
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BLACK RAGE II

Dedicated to
The Black Student Union
March 30, 2000

Acknowledgements

Giving birth is one of the greatest gifts our Creator has bestowed upon us. For this Father God, I say thank you. Thank you for gracing your children with creativity, passion, fervor and brilliancy—out of which comes this eclectic work of art. I am truly blessed to be the ordained Obstetrician for the Black Student Union's millennium child, Black Rage II. Thank you Father for granting me the privilege and capabilities to partake in and guide the conception of this masterpiece. As well, I thank you Lord God for brotherly and sisterly support. To all of the Black Rage contributors, Taja Gibbs, Tara Galberth, Marcita Peak, Elizabeth Washington, Erik Farley, and especially, Dr. Desmond Hamlet the Great, may our good God reward you for your much needed, sincerely appreciated, and exceptional efforts.

Real Woman Warrior Writin' On,
Ceara Nicole Flake

“Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing”

James Weldon Johnson

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of liberty
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list’ning skies
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

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Statement of Purpose

To allow for a creative outlet for members of the Black Student Union of Denison University.

Introduction

The need for this publication came about when the expressions of a number of Black students were denied from other campus publications without any valid justification. As history has proven, when faced with limitation, we as Black people then create a means for overcoming that limitation—a means that is significant to our own interests and beliefs. Therefore, we came together as a Black community in search of a resolution, and decided on **Black Rage** as the instrument by which we would let our creative voices sing. This unprecedented publication serves as a refuge for the Black students at Denison University, by offering an avenue for our poetry, prose, short stories as well as other unique writings to be read, respected, and held in utmost regards.

April Bass

I am a young Black woman. I wonder where my life is headed. I hear the trees call my name in sighs. I want to understand you. I see the pain in your eyes. I pretend to have no fears. I feel your spirit run through me. I touch your inner soul. I worry about tomorrow. I say it will be alright. I dream of a better day. I try to hear your problems. I hope in the end I will survive. I am a young black woman. I am the voice of Maya Angelou and the beauty of Cleopatra.

All of these qualities have inspired me to write. All are emotionally centered, and they are experiences that I go through daily. Sometimes I feel that my life is headed down the wrong path and I feel I am simply misguided, confused. I think that I am an outcast to society because I do not fit the norms. But don't worry, I've come to the conclusion that I am a *Rare Essence*. Sometimes I just have to sit and cry. So, beneath the moonlit sky as I watch people walk along carelessly not stopping to say hi, I write these lullabies, enabling the comfort of my soul. Although weeping may endureth for a night, joy always comes in the morning.

Despite the trials I go through, God always lets me know that I am His *Rare Essence*. He shows me through the Sun, each morning, that in some way I am essential. I captivate minds with the power of my tongue, the sway of my hips and the pen in my hand. Because he knows I cannot bear everything alone, he places people in my life to help get me across milestones. Although they might not stay in my view forever, their impact on my life remains eternally. So, to my star, I dedicate this, in honor of you, I write. For a short time, God blessed me with the power and brightness of your light.

I hope when reading my selection of poetry you will find something that relates to you, and learn a little more about me because...

"Eyes Are The Soul"

SOL the SUN

The seductiveness of the falling sun
Seduces the human mind
Transcending thoughts fall
Like dust blown off a train
Going through Arizona with subtle drops
of rain
No matter how weak my bones may be
The glistening of sun rays against my
chocolate skin
Soothes my soul and relaxes me
Looking into the sky's blue eyes
Changing colors rapidly
From blue to pink, pink to orange
Camouflaging its flaws
Showing the world its elegance as it
tangos with stars
Dipping and falling in slow sensations
Drives the mind wild
The mountains eagerly await the arrival
of the sun
Silent whispers in the wind
Invite it to come closer
But the sun knows her power
The hormones she sends throughout the
clouds
As she teases, hiding behind the white
cotton balls
Peeking out to captive the innocence of
one
Then exploding into the center
Giving off her rage of passion
Then silently sometimes unnoticeable
She makes her way to the mountains...
Scandalous
Caressing their backs with tender strokes
of warmth
She escapes the brightness of day
To *Salsa* in the dark

Eyes Are The Soul

I can see the secrets you hide
I can tell your eyes have become weak
From the tears that have fallen when you have cried
I can tell from your tongue all of your lies
Your eyes have told the places of all your alibis
I have seen the pain that you have stored
Your eyes have showed me the trauma in life that you have endured
Sometimes in life some things are left unnoticed
Not intended and sometimes never mended
Sometimes when the pain is too deep your eyes will
Close never to arise
The pressure within was kept too far inside

But...

Within those same eyes I have seen a flower to be nourished
The innocence of a child
The warmth of a blanket pressed softly against the skin of a body in winter
The shadow of a man who tries to secure me
I have climbed the mountains and I have reached their peaks
All within your eyes
I've drifted into seas of dolphins and explored the sands of the beautiful
Shores you hide
I didn't get there by a map or compass
I found the direction all within your eyes
I discovered areas that have never been reached
I found your inner soul the destination I sought
What Happened...?
Once again you shut me out
Why won't you let me ascertain what you're all about?
Why must you hide yourself from me?
I will not let you lose your way
I want to become emotionally and mentally one
I want to listen to your thoughts and learn from your knowledge
I want to see through your eyes without getting smothered in the fog
I'm afraid you're a rose drowning in your own water
I want to become your friend, the person you can depend on

Once again my words to you were pointless
You've blinked your eyes and I've lost my direction within your eyes
Even though your stares have scorned me
Your thorns have not pierced my essence
Later I will try again
Because if you look into my eyes you can tell it all comes from the heart!

Sometimes I Sit and Cry
Sometimes at night when I'm all alone
And the lights are fairly dim
My soul aches
Thoughts of failure roam the air
Like the smell of death after a California earthquake
I awake from trembles out of my tireless sleep
Awaken to silence and pain
Despair and Destruction
Wondering whom there is to blame
Unable to conceptualize my disassociation to the norms of society
Sometimes I sit and cry

Beneath the Moonlit Sky

Beneath the moonlit sky I write this lullaby
Passer-by walk along, only staring, not stopping to say hi
As I lay here beneath the moonlit sky
My days are tiresome and my nights are bleak, I'm lost in direction
I don't know what I seek
My mornings of glory have fallen, like tears from a mother's face
Lately I have been troubled as I am a disgrace
So tonight beneath the moonlit sky
As I watch all these careless people walk on by
As I glimpse above the stars so high
Mind turning rhymes flow through my head
Tonight beneath the moonlit sky
I no longer write this lullaby
I NOW SING THE BLUES

To My Baby, My Star, I Dedicate This

To you, my star, I dedicate this. In honor of you I write. For a short time
God has blessed me with the power and brightness of your light.

You showed me so much that at first I didn't notice, until I began to
watch... I watched your eyes shimmer, I admired the glow of your skin as I
ran my hands across. I stared in admiration of the warmth you released from
within, how you comforted me with your emotions. How you opened my
eyes to so many things.

Until I began to hear... I began to listen to your words as they molested my
ears. I began to dissect your thoughts, become one with your sense of truth.

Until I began to feel... I began to touch you. I felt your soul crash against
my heart. I allowed myself to become close with you.

Until I began to cry... I cried oceans of salt water covering your flesh, but yet
you held me and with the palm of your hand wiped them away.

To you, my star, I dedicate this. In honor of you I write. For a short time
God has blessed me with the power and brightness of your light.

I don't know where you came from. Hmm... you could have always been
around. But one night for some odd reason I looked up and saw you smiling
down. Sometimes you would leave me and I'm not sure where you would
go, but when the clouds would come in my life and sun seemed to no longer
want to shine, you would appear. Once again, I felt you, as the clouds would
slowly separate, your light soon appeared. Like a child crying for the milk of
his mother's breast you fed me... daily you nourished my body and mind.
Replacing its hunger and replenishing it with compassion, loyalty, and
strength.

To you, my star, I dedicate this. In honor of you I write. For a short time
God has blessed me with the power and brightness of your light.

When I cried, on the nights I felt alone, You gave me peace, embracing my
tears in the palm of your hands, holding them as though I was your earth.

I never told you but at night, I would say a little prayer

Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray for the star that brings me peace
He brings me so much joy each day
I hope he'll always shine my way
But God if his light starts to dim
Let him know how much I cared for him
Sometimes at night, when he shines so bright
I'd close the curtain to lessen the light
But God... to him I apologize

Sometimes I never gave back, too scared to...
So before I lay my head down to rest God promises that whosoever
Window he will shine over next
They will gain the sense of peace that my star
Brought to me. The peace that at night had sung me to sleep
To you, my star, I dedicate this. In honor of you I write. For a short time
God has blessed me with the power and brightness of your light.

Babila Lima

The poems that are presented in the following section represent the world as seen through my eyes. They were composed over a four year period, beginning with my senior year of high school and as late as my sophomore year of college. I chose to submit some of my older poems because they represent the stage in my life in which I began to become aware of American inconsistencies concerning race, and the intersection of race and class. These poems are written through the eyes of a Black Baltimorean teenager, Babila Lima. Listen with your eyes and not your ears... Peace.

"Too Strong, Too Wise, Too Black"

Who am I?

I am invisible,
but

the powers that be
call me Black.

Is it because

Black is in direct opposition
to

white whiteness whiter whitey?

Whiteness has risen to a state of mathematic control.

Whiteness has connoted purity,

holiness,

angel

light

cleansing

angle food.

I am Black? I am Black. I am Black!

What does that make me?

Dirty, sinful, ugly

inmate # (2-12-1-3-11).

18 years of capitalistic socialization

has lied to me:

your dick is bigger

because

your lips are thicker

your

place is at the bottom of

our triangle nigger.

I know what I am:

angry.

Vote Ronnie

This morning as I rode the little bus to Manlius Pebble Hill, I sat close to the window so

I could see what my part of the world looks like in the morning. A young, short haired man in

A brown leather jacket stood on the sidewalk displaying an orange and white sign.

"Vote Ronnie," the sign read in fat orange letters. The vote Ronnie man stood out in the Syracuse cold smiling and waving at the passers-by without receiving them in return, as two young girls walked pass with book bags one half their own weight. The vote Ronnie man smiled, handed down two orange pencils and continued to wave at us passers-by.

Change

Hey hey cuse me brother

Ah

Give me some change,

--what

can I get some change?

--ain't got no change for a dollar,

all I got is $\frac{3}{5}$ of a dollar, if you wanna compromise

--give me a token

ism ism is I'm hearing you correctly?

--bestow upon me a token

ism ism is um that your leader

--got my isms, got my voting sir, please give me a token

ism ism is one *Connerly* enough?

--that's not enough change

Nefertiti Shamfa Nkpanom Oji-Njideka

Sistahood is a way of life that many women do not understand. To be a woman in African American culture is a sacred responsibility that many women do not wish to understand. This knowledge saddens me greatly. To know that the keepers of the culture would rather visit it on holidays than live it and preserve it for future generations sends me into a rut of disappointment and disgust. History has already displayed the support we can expect from the rest of the world. Therefore, Sistah's if you do not preserve your culture, teach your children and take care of your men, I am really unclear about who it is that you think is going to do so.

Beauty, intelligence, gracefulness, and accomplishment are all in our nature. They are nothing new. The speech "Sistahood" is meant to challenge the African and African American woman to stop acting brand new, to understand that it is not just all about you and yours, and to reassure you that you are as good as you know you are—you have nothing to prove.

"Proud To Be a Sistah"

Sistahood

Let us talk about sistahood. Sistahood isn't something that can be developed in one generation. It isn't something new. Sistahood is the strength of your grandmother, your great-grandmother, your great-great-grandmother, and so on for generations past. It isn't something that comes with an organization that when you "cross" you all of a sudden have sistahood. More importantly, sistahood is not only sistah to sistah, it is sistah to brothah as well. Sistahood is heart, it's strength, and it's endurance. It's taking the baton from those who ran before you and no matter where you are in the race, running as hard and as fast and as long as you can until you make up ground just as those before you did. Sistahood is when you take care of your own and others as well. By your own, I mean your home, your people, and your culture. Black women have been doing this for so long—taking care of our own, as well as others. That's why we are called sistahs, the keepers of the sistahood.

Child birth
Something unique to women
To sistahs and daughters
Giving birth
In the mornings
In the field that evening
Dare I say
Dare I say
Strong and tired
But still here

The Native American Cherokee and Blackfoot nations that shape my being, my features and my culture were massacred, infected and stripped of everything. My great-grandmothers, small Indian women with big smiles are still here. There are still Pow-Wows. I still African dance. That is what sistahood is about.

Can you bring forth prosperity, regardless of your circumstances? Can you bring forth the culture to the next generation? Can you bring forth a next generation? Can you raise the

child of your brother along with achieving your dreams and goals and can you sacrifice your dreams and goals if you can't do both? That's a sistah.

Sistahood is what you have here today. It's what you need to be. It's what you must become if you are not already. It's action, a way of life, an understanding. When you can do this, when you have developed these qualities, then you will be ready to join an organization because you will know that you didn't just become a sistah.

I use sistahood with organization so often because that's what people think of when you mention sistahood on a college campus. Sistahood isn't something that you get from an organization. It is something that you bring with you into an organization. Sistahood is responsibility. It is knowing that you are not just living for yourself, that there is a possibility that you may be grandmothers and great-grandmothers and you must live in respect to these possible outcomes by taking care of yourself and your family so that if you don't live very long, your knowledge is passed on, your daughters understand sistahood and are capable of bringing forth a prosperous generation without you. Sistahs be sure you're representing. Represent and conduct yourselves as you would want your daughters and your sons to represent and conduct themselves.

All of these things must be done in conjunction with your brothahs. Respect them and honor them as well. You cannot bring forth a future generation by yourselves. So, do unto your brothahs as you would have them do unto your sons. Remember, you might be wife someday, as well as sister and daughter.

Lastly sistahs, teach your children. Knowledge is survival as well as power. Don't let them get this far and not know the truth about their history, about our history, about our world history. Teach them facts. Expose them to different cultures and let them see things in different

perspectives and depths. Teach them pragmatics. Teach them logic. Teach them continuity and perseverance. Make sure your children *know*.

The very last point I want to emphasize is culture. Your whole way of life is culture, black women, women of color. Be true to yourselves, continue giving back throughout your life, not just once a year or once a month. Remember, someone gave for you to get here. Don't be confused. You are the descendants of the oldest people on the planet. Know and move forward. Maintain the sistahood.

Yaida Ford

Billie Holiday (1915-1959), unlike many singers of her era, did not read music—she *was* music. It took me two years to learn to appreciate Billie and her artistic vision. The lady does not come from a legacy of great jazz artists—she started that legacy. She embodies the very essence of the musical legacy of the thirties, forties, and the fifties. If you listen to Billie, let her take you “there,” to that way back time, she will do just that. That’s what she does. That’s...

“Billie”

What Billie Says...

Late at night Billie talks to me as I sway my head softly and gently shut my eyelids and just listen. She takes me away from all of the daily madness that confronts my soul...and I just listen. Yeah, Billie's talkin'.

The smoothness in her tone and the clarity of her words demand that I let go...let go of all my anxieties and I just listen to Billie tell me her stories. She tells me about her *April in Paris* and how she saw the *Stars Fall on Alabama*. Hush now, Billie's talkin'.

The lady inspires me. I'm moved by her silky sounds. I want to follow her melodies as she promises to take me "there." I long to go *East of the Sun* or travel to *Some Other Spring* where the twilight falls. I'll even help her color those *Stormy Blues*. I want to talk what Billie's talkin'.

You can't even understand that me and Billie be singin' the same song. You can't really handle the lady. She's too much for you. You want her to relay the same sad story, but she's got many tales to tell. That's Billie. So just listen to what she says.

Woman's Work

(dedicated to bicultural people everywhere)

I am an ambidextrous woman

I stand at the crossroads of peace and violence
and if I do not move I fly

I am a many-sighted woman

I toil at the horizon of
dawning vision
and if I do not break
I cry

I am an ancient-souled woman

I sit at the entrances of caves
and if I do not hate
I dream

I am a multi-tongued woman

I stand at the crossroads
of violence and silence
and if I do not strangle
I sing!

-Dr. Toni King

Untitled

the class I teach
on
gender
is not a semester
event
it is a cataclysmic
condition
that no one
recognizes

the class I teach
on race
is not a semester
event
either
it is a chronic
illness
that no one
believes

-Dr. Toni King

Andrea Bennett

The following are poems I have written throughout my life—for, besides God, paper has always and will always be my true best friend. I'm sure that you have had many people claim to *know* you at a time when you barely knew yourself; this is where my motivation to write comes from. Although my poems are child-like in nature, there are more complexities that arrive when one digs deep into the symbolism and emotions that are bottled up into my words. They do not define me. They are not who I am, but an attempt to share with you my experiences as a woman of many identities. Enjoy cuz, "Genie, I want to free you!" May you find frustration and harmony in my words and understand that what people show of themselves is not always what you think. Now, embark upon the rest of your journey in life. God bless.

"The Gray Area In between"

Color Crayon World

When I was a child I thought of certain concepts in a kid's world
Nothin' better than play dough and the big box of color crayons

What are you?

People would ask

My background?

I got steamed up and excited to explain to them

You say that my daddy's BLACK

You say that my mommy's WHITE

So, in a color crayon world I'd be

GRAY not BROWN or a mixed up HONEY

She mixed

Yeah, only people who ask the right questions get the right answers

The way I see it

Nobody's as BLACK as a color crayon

Or as YELLOW or RED

Or OLIVE as a color crayon

But if you really must know

In a color crayon world

I'm like a burnt sienna gray

My Angel, My Sara

She walks the earth without realizing how
Special she is
God gave her strength
So that she may see happiness
After all her sorrows turned to dust
And blew out her door
My angel, My Sara follows truth and prayer
My angel, my Sara is not only my
Angel, but God's too
She will no longer be my angel when she goes away
But she's always in my heart
The heart of those who love her
And she is always my sister
God made her that way
My angel, my Sara
As He has done for many others
My angel, my Sara

LYLAS

Love Ya Like A Sister

Just a Picture

Paint my face darker to
Represent the Hispanic culture

I'm not happy

Cuz

They might not like that

Keep the status quo

With your pictures

I know your game

But I was too young

To say anything

Why couldn't I just be me?

Sure, I could pass for many

But

I know who I really am

Truncated my name

Now put it back together

Just a picture

Another opportunity to pass

Let The Rain Do Your Cryin'

The rain is an omen
of fears of our loved ones,
tears from those sailing clouds
They're watching us lose our ground
Let's find the rainbow
the pot of gold
The stairway to heaven, which they behold
Let the rain do your cryin'
All your troubles disappear
Each time the rain has cleared
you've thought of all the things gone wrong
While the rain shed all your tears
The angels sing their songs
Atop of their wings
They will take you for a ride
on top of a rainbow
a pot of gold
Let's find these treasures
these contents behold,
Let the rain do your cryin'

Justin Garrison

I would first like to take this time to thank those individuals who made this publication possible. Ms. Michelle Watts, Class of '99, brought this literary magazine to life and filled it with sweet, powerful, and heartfelt words from her brothers and sisters. With the strength and guidance of Dr. Desmond Hamlet, phenomenal professor of English and magnificent man in general, **Black Rage** was born. Now, in the hands of two dynamic divas: Ms. Ceara Nicole Flake, Class of '01 and Ms. Taja Gibbs, Class of '02, Black Rage will be carried to new heights, floating on the oceans of creativity of two intense intellectuals. I am honored to showcase my work within this colorful collection of eclectic expression.

My showcased pieces are dedicated to the darkness in which one can find his- or herself enveloped, trapped, and shackled. Life's strongholds tend to be much more than we can ever imagine, and many of them are potentially deadly. Hatred is one of them. Allowing ourselves to hate someone because of what we believe about that person is wrong and unfair. Our people in particular have fought too long and hard with others to come to blows with each other. Embrace someone who is different from you, for the experiences that you may have in common should determine your relationship. Furthermore, get to know yourself. Find your own ideas and come to your own conclusions about issues and concerns of society, rather than jumping on the bigotry bandwagon and waving your oppressive and ignorant flag. Make everyone happy by first pleasing yourself. Enjoy as I take you...

"Over The Rainbow"

Ecstasy

Hundreds of faces, some with hints of crimson,
climbing the staircase to heaven,
only to descend.
The heat froze my jacket to my anxious body,
chilling.
Peering over the ledge, the edge of reality,
the sea of gods, creating waves of sexuality before my eyes.
A steamy mist hovered above.
My cover slid down the slopes of my arms
to the floor,
as I joined the ocean of divinity.

My silk shirt bounced with me while I moved,
weaving through the mist against the muscles of the sea.
Beads of arousal slid over mounds of hard flesh,
the mist meant to cool the sizzling heat
from one to another.
Limbs bridged the gap of unfamiliarity;
speech was suppressed.
Sensuality was the sole idiom.

Two round disks,
expensive as effective,
tossed within my body for absorption,
awaiting response
from them.
Eventually,
glints of feeling
showered upon my spine,
dispersed to every nerve charged with pleasure,
though not concentrated.
A swipe of salve on my temples and forehead
to enhance my intake
and export.

My hands cupped semicircles of eroticism,
protruding buttons of sensitivity
tickling my palms.
I rose to a zenith of pleasure,
absolute bliss,
utter happiness,
Ecstasy.

Back From The Dead

Back from the dead,
as my corpse moves about the same path
that led me to my end,
it endures the same evil
by which the coffin
was nailed shut.
Dark grins from those living faces,
same black chuckles that ate my heart.
Has my loss been felt by anyone
but the one?

I can almost recite the wishes of several
for me to return.
Excited, I feel
loved,
missed,
needed.
Though their care is but another mask
behind which they hide,
masquerade to the world
as every other girl in spirit,
but really quite manly mind.

I receive all darts,
blunt, pointed,
swift,
and though they may cripple me,
I do not fall.
I lie down
with carefree thoughts,
and find myself dead
to the world,
though alone
and conscious.
But I'm here again
Back from the dead.

A Spot of Coffee

"I don't know, Mark."

"You have always said that you wondered what it was like," he said, sighing.

"I know, but I am just not sure that I want to explore my curiosity with you sitting there, ready to pounce on us!" Rachel exclaimed. "Besides, where am I supposed to find someone who will be willing to do this?"

"I don't know, but I'm sure that there is someone that would be interested," Mark replied.

The aroma of coffee and cinnamon bagels drifted throughout the room, as the door to the coffeehouse invited cold breezes inside with every entrance and exit. Mark and Rachel sat in a booth along the royal blue wall, decorated with caricature paintings from a local Latina artist. Mark wore a beige wool pullover, blue jeans, and a baseball cap, yet shivered from the cool draft. He gazed upon the art like a child at a science museum, his mouth agape while studying the talented work.

"I'm going to buy one of these paintings for my room, Rache'," he said. "Don't you think that would be cool?"

Rachel nodded her head. She wore a pair of black stretch jeans and a baby blue, V-neck sweater. Her hair was arranged in a tight bun and her beautiful, pearl face glowed under the warm lamp. She thought about the discussion between her and Mark, her eyes circling along the pattern of the tablecloth.

Rachel was an outstanding student, receiving no grade below a B on any assignment, let alone any test, throughout high school. She served as the captain of her cheerleading squad, student council vice-president, and member of the National Honor Society. Her parents enforced strict Catholic morals upon her, including that of abstinence from sex before marriage.

However, by being an only child, Rachel was imaginative and ambitious, even when her school

studies were not the subject. She was very careful to hide her sexual activity from her parents, though she had wished, at this point, that she had listened to them and abstained.

"So, you think of anybody yet?" Mark asked, after sipping his steamy cappuccino. "I have someone in mind."

"Who, Mark? And it better not be that skank in your weightlifting class. I've heard that she has seen more of the insides of the football team's thighs than the school nurse!" Rachel snapped.

"I know, she's pretty nasty," Mark agreed, wickedly smiling as he shuffled through some memories. "But who else is there? We have to find someone who would do something like this. Maybe a slut is just what we need."

"Okay. Tell me what you want to happen again. Mark. I guess that might help us...me...decided who to approach," Rachel suggested, rolling her eyes, striking the bridge of her nose with her middle finger and thumb. This would make the millionth time in which she was enlightened with his fantasy.

"Alright," Mark began, licking his lips and leaning in toward Rachel. "First, we all share a bowl in the basement by the fireplace, just sitting back and chillin' together, right? Okay, then we start kissing and feeling on each other, and I suggest going into the next room to my bed. Then, you start taking off your clothes and she'll start taking her clothes off, then I say 'Hey! Why don't you two strip each other!'" Mark was so excited, he almost spilled his coffee.

"Then, I sit in the dark, out of the red light, and you and her go at it, kissing and feeling all on each other, then get into the bed and..."

"Okay, Mark!" Rachel interrupted, lifting her head in annoyance. "So, you'll sit there the whole time and just watch?"

"Well, I mean, I want to join in maybe."

“Yeah, I guess so!” Rachel retorted. “My question is: Why does this “extra” have to be a female? What if I told you that I wanted to have a guy join us in the bedroom? Then would you want to “join in?”

Rachel sat back against the cushion, her eyebrows at the top of her forehead, anticipating Mark’s reply. The subject of a male rather than a female addition to the couple’s sex life had been discussed almost as often as the latter, which seemed to quell the initial interest altogether. Mark swore never to be naked with another man in a sexual situation, let alone with his girlfriend. He made it clear to Rachel that he considered an additional man in the relationship as one step from homosexuality, and he was not going that route. Rachel felt confused by his ambivalence; on the one hand, he insisted that she compromise her feelings of homosexual activity for his own pleasure when, on the other, he refused to consider the possibility of fulfilling her fantasy.

“I told you how I felt about that shit, Rachel,” Mark replied, shaking his head, rubbing the back of his neck. “Besides *you* said *you* were curious, not me.”

“Yeah, but you are so insistent on me choosing someone to mess around with...why don’t you pick a guy to do the same?” Rachel suggested.

“What! What are you talking about? Rae you trying to suggest something here, Rachel?” Mark asked, appearing very agitated.

Rachel believed that Mark held suppressed feelings of homosexual urges, and specifically attributed them to the homoerotic tradition of the fraternity. Mark had broken several plans because of “the guys,” which forced Rachel to do research on the history of the fraternity system. She discovered that the brothers, despite the social and service aspects of the organization, engaged in fraternal activities, especially concerning hazing. She came to the conclusion that those fraternities that enjoyed humiliating perspective members by forcing them to be naked and

perform various sexual deeds while the others watched in amusement were, to some degree, homosexual. Rachel decided to rule out the possibility that Mark was only attracted to me because, obviously, if they engaged in sexual intercourse, he was physically responsive to a female. However, she did consider his ardent stand against involving another male, in addition to his passionate connection with his fraternity brothers.

"I am just trying to get some reciprocation here, Mark. It seems like our sex life is about you, you, you!" Rachel explained. "I have someone in mind."

Mark sat up, resting his chin on his fist. He gave Rachel a rather awkward stare, as if he had been dreading this moment, yet anticipating it as well. Rachel sensed his interest and gave a sly smile, as if she too was consumed by anticipation.

"I think my friend, Aaron, thinks you're cute. Besides that, he was interested in joining your frat."

"What! There is no way that I am about to share my girlfriend with her best *guy* friend!" Mark shouted. "When did he say this? Did you make him say that? He doesn't even know me that well, only through you. Why did he say that? Join my frat, yeah right!"

Rachel sat motionless, watching in disbelief as Mark fell apart about the entire idea.

"Okay, forget it. I see where you are coming from, and I guess that I will just have to keep renting the videos until you come around, without mentioning another guy," Mark settled. "Let's get out of here."

Rachel looked around the room of the coffeehouse, noticing that her and Mark were the only patrons remaining. The chairs stood atop of the tables within the center of the room, indicating the initial stage of closing duties. The two had debated for an hour, which ended as any other disagreement between them: Mark rising as the loser, and Rachel accommodating him once again.

“Just a minute. I will leave the tip if you go take care of the bill,” Rachel offered.

“Okay, babe. I’m sorry. You still love me?” Mark asked, hugging Rachel close, pressing himself against her flat stomach.

“Yes, you know I do, jerk,” she replied, lightly slapping Mark’s muscular arm. Mark walked around the room, selecting a painting from the wall, and brought it to the counter at the front of the shop. The painting depicted an up-close portrait of a Black man, but only featured half of his nose, half of his lips, and the very bottom of his right eye, which was positioned at a peripheral angle. To the left and behind the figure in the forefront of the painting, stood another Black man, who looked as if he was staring from a distance. Mark smiled happily as the clerk cashed him out and rolled the painting, placing it in a cardboard tube.

“Ready, Rache’?” Mark asked, oddly excited and energetic.

“So, you said Aaron was interested in the frat, right?”

Journey

The sun gently kissed Eileen's forehead as it peeked through the curtain of fog resting upon the wooded acre upon which her wooden house stood. It was morning, another day. She lie in bed, her eyes fixed upon the slow and steady motion of the ceiling fan that cooled her and Esther during those steamy June nights. Objects about the room that had frightened her during the night came into perspective. Not a murderer, but a coat rack. Not a blade, but a mirror. She sighed, wiping the beads of sweat from her forehead and with the back of her index finger. It was still too early to wake Esther, but Eileen needed to begin her day.

She raised herself from the damp mattress and sat on the side of her bed, her feet dangling over the dusty hardwood floor. With one yawn, she stood and stretched, careful not to catch her hands in the path of the fan blades. Eileen wandered around the room, struggling to avoid the creaky places in the floor so as to not awaken her sister or the rest of the family. She arrived at her closet and swung the door open quickly, hoping that the monster that had been hiding within the clothes would disappear in the daylight. She retrieved a yellow cotton sundress, which had a lace bow in the back just above the waist. It was going to be another hazy day in Mississippi, so she planned to dress accordingly.

Eileen threw the dress over her arm and went to the dresser for a pair of panties. Then she crept to the door of her bedroom and stood. Her breath was hot and her breathing pattern had escalated, as if it were night again and her turn to shut off the lights. She pressed her head against the door to listen for any other movements about the house. When she felt sure that the family was asleep, she slowly reached the doorknob and begun to turn.

Holding onto the handle, so as not to make a sound from the crude metal, Eileen little by little, released the knob, and peered around the dark hallway. Her parents' bedroom door was ajar, which meant one of two things: either He was already awake, or had come in drunk the

night before and failed to close the door behind him. Eileen shuddered at the thought of him being out of bed, her tiny frame folding in fear. Her eyes fell, swaying from side to side, strategizing her streak across the floor from her bedroom to the washroom.

She opened the door a little wider and peeked out, suddenly gasping in frightful surprise. There He stood, piercing the darkness with a single match, which faded to an orange glow at the end of a cigarette. Panic raced along every nerve in Eileen's body. She remained frozen, her mouth agape, speechless. Her eyes began to flood with tears, though she was far too frightened to sob. As she desperately tried to focus, it became clear that He was standing in the corner of the hallway, just outside of his bedroom, staring at Eileen. A cloud of gray smoke flooded the hall and stood buoyant, for the air was thick and humid in the stifling house.

Eileen quickly moved away from the door, falling backwards on her hands to the hard floor. She was terrified. A flow of tears ran down her face, curling under her chin. She could not breathe. She could not cry. She remained on the floor, her face yellow, her body lightly shaking in terror.

Then, there was a slam. The door of their room was hung improperly, so it slammed closed unless guided to the hinge. Eileen jumped at the sound, as if it were a gunshot. She began to breathe again, slowly picking herself up from the floor and returned to the door. She grabbed the edge, peering around it again to make sure that He was within his own room. After a wide-eyed five minutes, when she was sure that he was nowhere in the hallway, Eileen darted towards the washroom, threw her dress at the bathtub, and slammed the door behind her. She grabbed the rusty chair that sat next to the bathtub and placed its back under the doorknob. Sighing in relief, she sat on the toilet and caught her breath.

Eileen took a bath and put on her dress, then stood in front of the mirror and combed her hair. She stared at her reflection, studying the contours of her face and the shape of her budding

breasts. She was twelve years old, but had not developed as quickly as her friends from across the way. She could not understand the delay in her puberty for she had yet to begin her menstrual cycle as well. Other girls were desirable, she thought, for they had things to offer boys who were interested. She was a woman, trapped in the body of a ten-year-old boy, whose only claim to femininity was to wear the prettiest dresses her mother could make. They made her feel special.

The usual morning hustle filled the house, as children ran to and from the washroom, Mama tended to the eggs and ham on the stove, and He sat on the porch with a beer, more than likely not his first. As Mama called the family to the table for breakfast, Eileen noticed him staring at her from the porch window into the dining room, pacing back and forth, in and out of sight. He disappeared for more than a minute, which puzzled Eileen enough to force her stare, wondering where He had gone. Then, He suddenly jumped in front of the window, his face as rough as concrete, with an open mouth of no more than ten, green and black teeth. Eileen flinched, rolling her eyes and sighing in annoyance.

"Leen, go tell y' daddy to get in here and eat fo' it gets cold, heah?" Mama said. Eileen looked up at her, watching as she placed the bowl of grits and a plate of ham on the table.

"Did you heah me?" Mama stopped.

"Yes, ma'am, answered Eileen, slowly rising from her chair. She could smell the cigarette smoke from the porch, filtering through the screen door. Creeping to the door, still on hardwood floor, she stood at the doorway, waiting for her Mama to yell from the kitchen. Nothing.

"Time to eat, Mama said," Eileen pressed her face against the screen.

"Alright. Damn, it's a fine day. I'm goin' to the sto' soon's we finish eatin'."

Eileen stared blankly outside. She could only think of getting to school, her and Esther. The fact that she left immediately after breakfast sat uneasy within her mind. At least Esther would be there to witness if anything happened, thought Eileen. She could run fast and would be sure to inform Mama of whatever awful thing He had done. Eileen walked slowly back to the table. She heard the screen door creak as it opened, and she hurriedly sat down, her eyes gazed upon the smooth glass surface of her plate.

"Bout time you cam in." Mama sat down to the left of Eileen, tying a bib on Ethan, Eileen's baby brother.

"Say grace, 'Leen."

The family bowed their heads. Eileen looked up, her head still lowered, to see if the rest of the family was prepared to bless the meal. Her eyes met his, He stared at her and gave her a dark grin, then slowly closed his eyes.

"Leen?" Mama said, her eyes closed and her head bowed, speaking towards the right.

Eileen swallowed.

"Lord, please bless this food that we are about to receive and let it be nourishment to our bodies so that we may do Your Will. Amen."

"Amen," in unison.

Breakfast was hasty and silent as always. Mama frequented the kitchen to retrieve more paper towels to soak up the juice that Ethan had spilled. Esther stabbed at her ham with her fork, her head resting on her fist. Eileen watched the clock, following the second hand around the face, waiting for the moment in which she could jump up and leave. She was hesitant, waiting for him to get up and get ready for the long walk into town. He just sat at the table, staring at the clock, too, waiting for Eileen.

"Girl, you betta git up and git movin'. You know you got schoo'."

"Yes, ma'am." Eileen pushed away from the table and stood up. She tousled Esther's hair, trying hard to avoid eye contact with him. Then, He stood up.

"Hey, guhl. I'm goin' to do sto'. Be back in 'bout an hour. Aight?"

"I guess. You said you would cut the bushes today. You ain't fohgot, is you?"

"Naw, woman. I ain't fuhgot. I keep tellin' ya I will be back. Damn!"

Suddenly, Esther's breakfast reappeared on her plate. Eileen grabbed her hair and held it back while pieces of ham and yellow matter sprung from her mouth.

"Oh Laws! Go get something. 'Leen. Quick!" Mama shouted.

Eileen raced to the kitchen and grabbed a dirty towel that hung on the refrigerator door handle. She returned to the dining room, surprised to see Mama and Esther at the staircase, Mama's arm around her sickly daughter.

"Leen, you go on to school, heah? Ess ain't goin' nowhere today." Mama yelled behind her.

Eileen stood confused at the dining room table, holding the filthy towel. She looked back to see the mess at Esther's place, only to meet eyes with him. She quickly turned, and shouted up to Mama.

"Ma! She can go. She just needs to rest a little bit. I'll wait."

"Girl, what did I jes say? Now go'n. You worryin' me now!"

Eileen was dumbfounded. She looked back at him, who was chuckling under his breath. She knew that there was nothing she could do to make herself feel better about her journey to school. He was going to do something awful on the way. She knew it. But she had to go to school. Mama would never allow her to miss, especially since she was the oldest.

He stood up, stretched, scratched his stomach, and waddled to the front door.

"You comin', 'Leen, baby?"

The sound of his words sent glints of electricity through her body. She began to breathe heavily once again. She began to perspire. Her mouth was suddenly dry. She grabbed her books and tore through the door, running past him, as he stood there, smiling.

Eileen ran as fast as she could, through the forest, over the bridge, under the willow trees. She heard his powerful footsteps behind her, inching closer with every long leap. She found that she had strayed from the path, probably while she was blindly running, her eyes burning from the sweat that flowed from her forehead like a waterfall. She stopped, looking around to find her bearings again. Then, out of nowhere, He jumped out from behind a tree and tackled Eileen, crushing her with the weight of his burly body. Eileen cringed with agony as she felt her tiny bones crumble on the inside. She screamed for her life, brandishing her legs and arms with all her might. The pain from moving struck her like an anvil, yet she fought on.

He reached under her dress and grabbed the back of her panties. With a smile on his face, he yanked at them and they tore with one forceful tug. Eileen wailed in horror as his foul finger entered her. She raised her leg to her chest and kicked him square in the face, nearly breaking his nose. He roared with rage, holding his mouth as blood from his swollen lip soaked his fingers.

Eileen rolled onto her side and tried to stand, but she was crippled from the pain of her aching body. He grabbed her foot, yanking her leg toward him, almost dislocating it. With her right leg, she kicked him across the face, which knocked him to the ground, unconscious. Eileen then crawled to the nearest tree, so that she might attempt to stand, bloody and battered. She finally got to her feet, grabbed a huge rock nearby, and hobbled over to him, standing over his limp body. She raised her arms above her head with all her might, holding the rock in both hands, weeping to the clouds about the horrible treatment she had endured for far too long. Her

arms grew weak, however, and the heavy rock fell from her grasp onto the crown of her head, sending her to the earth, atop him.

Chris Million

I am Chris Million, a sophomore from Columbus, OH. I grew up in a predominately white neighborhood and attended predominately white schools. I believe that the misconceptions people hold obstruct them from true community, from real dialogue. While I struggle to overcome my own prejudices, I intend to work to help others recognize what they sacrifice when they label people, when they think in stereotypes, and when they are content to look no further than appearance. For we are all, not only oppressed, but the oppressor in each of us, gravely injured by the injustices of racism in America.

“Finding Place” was written with some intention at highlighting the more subtle, if only slightly more so, instances of racism and its intersection in the life of the individual. I wrote the poem in very different sections, in terms of both structure and voice, in order to recognize the potential for varied reactions to the unique experiences of African-Americans in particular, but perhaps all the disenfranchised of our nation. I intended for it be lyrical, image rich, but political above all else. If this does not fit your aesthetic, you might be reading the wrong poem. The narrator is loosely based on a few genuine and courageous black men I know, with the inevitable inclusion of small parts of myself. As a young white man offering such a small contribution to an ambitious publication of such quality, I will leave my piece untitled. I want to express my deep gratitude to the Black Student Union for making me feel so welcomed in their home, and also to Ceara Flake for her support and charisma.

Finding Place

1.

No, I don't ball.
Plenty of folks don't, you know.
Going to school in a small
Town, I didn't have much chance.

Sure, I speak well.
You do too. Should they award
Us for the way we can spell
This Saxon language imposed?

No, I ain't strong.
I run sometimes, no lifting.
I feel better off among
The dusty library shelves.

Yeah, I respect.
I'm no Baptist, no preacher's
Son—I feel the intellect
Is congruent with Nature.

2.

As a boy in Massillon, I would take
my little brothers to play at the west banks
of the Tuscarawas. Poppies nodded somberly
together between the bike path and the briars.
My brothers were in their mud pie phase
but I loved the field, the smells of wet earth
and bitter wintercress. Once I crouched low
in those weeds to stalk a rabbit upwind. Mama
said kids like us have to catch our own pets.
On my hands and knees I crept, surprised
at every moment that it was still. Close,
I sprung and clutched at its chest. But it
was only water-stained wood, and how I had
convinced myself it wasn't, I'll never know.

3.

"Boy," said Mr. McFarland, my first boss,
"You sweep like God figures His Creation
And my floor are dirty enough." I lost
Years in that coarse uniform, devotion
Not focused on a car or blithe romance.
I bought my buddies cigarettes and saved.
Waiting for life to begin, for a chance,
I hung like the dust I breathed every day.

And now you shoot me glances like I'm here
To meet some quota or liberal bill.
And still you maintain we're on level ground.
Are you all surprised by my soft black hair?
Does touching it make you better, the thrill
Of convincing yourself your mind is sound?

Julie Wade

We all know how hectic college life can be. There are some days that start off in a rush and end that way. As a Jamaican, I find it natural to express my feelings in the dialect that I speak called Patois. It's one of those dialects that tend to chop many English words in half, while leaving out some altogether. In any case, even if a reader finds the Patois dialect to be a bit hard to grasp, the overall message of my poem, "Mi Tired," is clear—during busy weeks I long for the chance to slow down and enjoy the little things in each day, but usually...

"Mi Tired"

Mi Tired

Mi can tell uno dis much,
Mi nah res' all day.
From when mi get up inna di morning
Is all wuk and no play.
No, mi neva get fi siddown
An' tek in one show,
Mi neva get fi stan' up
An' paint mi big toe.
Mi neva get fi finish
Di essay mi a write,
Look like it gwine tek me
Up until midnight.
Mi eyebrow need fi pluck,
Mi shoes need fi shine,
Mi woulda mek mi bed dis morning
If only mi did hav' di time.
An mercy, when mi done running
From one en' to di nex,
Mi had fi tek time to email
Mi sista who was vex.
So yes, me is tired
And ah was go mi bed.
Mi eye dem ah water
Bring dat pillow come fi mi head.
And is no lie ah telling,
Mi jus really wah fi know
If dere will eva be a day
Dat mi can tek mi time wid and go slow.

Elizabeth Washington

I wrote the following poems before I came to Denison. They depict my view of love and its affects. I often write poetry as an initial reaction to an event that either bothered or delighted me. The final poem in my selection, "Hold On To Your Dreams," was written to help me remain focused on my goals as I have had many people try to discourage me from fulfilling all that I have envisioned. My desire is that it would spark others to pursue their dreams despite the world's pessimistic views.

"Hold On To Your Dreams"

The Short Kiss Goodbye

He briefly kissed me goodnight,
Rushing to leave the site,
But I remember the brush of his lips,
It traveled through my body and every tip,
It journeyed an untraceable path,
To be gone Forever, and through
Every night soon to pass.

Michael

I've cried

I've sung

I've danced

I've moaned

I've ached

I've grown

I've sat

I've stood

I've fallen

I've begged

I've lost

I've won

I've forgotten

I've remembered

I've forgiven

I've smiled

I've laughed

I've loved every moment with you.

Love: Take One Hundred and 1

The thought of you tickles my heart,
Your voice makes my intentions sound.
Anticipation creates weariness,
longing for your sweet embrace.
Sincere in nature,
Honest in heart,
Worthy of trust,
You won me over right from the start,
I've tried to deny it,
So foolish to do,
As all my accusations,
You've proved not to be true.
Love once created distress,
But your existence alone makes those memories depart.
Timid to invest in this mysterious affinity,
Your persuasion assured that I take the risk.
A risk for a week,
next a month,
soon to be...eternity.
Friends shocked by disbelief,
question my certainty.
Convinced my feelings are foolish,
they stand behind this doubt,
Refusal to accept our blessed joining,
I remain confident.
Wedded bliss this may not lead,
But what we share is unique.
Your benign nature makes me call
you, "Confidant"
Your accepting nature makes me call
you, "Friend"
My attraction towards you begs,
to not let this end.
No matter the circumstance,
Nor outcome as well,
You've touched my life,
and my soul sings,
a new song, from this day forth,
praising your presence,
and dancing to the rhythm of your heart.

Hold On To Your Dreams

Hold tight to those childhood fantasies,
Don't let them drift away
Hold on to those wishing-well hopes,
Don't let others lead you astray.
Keep making wishes on shooting stars,
Don't be dismayed.
Be inspired to improve,
Don't give up hope.
Keep trying to be your ideal person,
Don't give up on yourself.
Keep living in your fantasy world,
Don't let life's worries interfere.
For an unsought dream is a
waste of a lifetime.
Hold on to your dreams,
for only you can determine
what there outcome may be.

Daisy Juana Enriquez

Black Art has persevered. Why is that a surprise to so many people? Luckily, I had the opportunity to explore the history of Black Art. It was basically like taking a survey of my own life. What people don't seem to realize, what we haven't grasped is that we breathe Black Art everyday. The forms of Black expression, communication—that is Black Art. And it's not a neo-phenomenon of the twentieth century. We have had it in our blood for thousands of years... We brought it with us here to this so-called New World.

For me, the most exciting Black Art is that which acts as a venue for RESISTANCE and AFFIRMATION. My life's work is about resistance against all those ideologies, institutionalized structures, and people—both within and outside of the Black Community—who keep us enslaved, who want us to be “niggerized.” Affirmation is also key, especially for us Black WOMBen. It is only Black WOMBen who possess the power to restructure societal conceptions of our female identity by first reevaluating our conceptions of self. It's a painfully tiring and honest endeavor to take on, but eventually it must be done if we are to accomplish anything. For me, my art, my spoken word, the poetry, and the images...these were the ways I began to REAFFIRM myself.

The poetry you are about to read is the artistic manifestation of my experience as Black, Filipina. WOMBan, Daughter, Sister, Lover...as Teacher, Revolutionary, Organizer...as one who is tired, angry, blessed and loved. This poetry is the word from one HUEman to another. Stay Blessed & Write On!

“Black Art Perseveres”

Mr. Brothaman

Swore I didn't need you in my life
But when ya walk in
Catchin' myself 'fore I stumble
Be's a strife.

Tell me
Mr. Brothaman
Why is it with me
ya wanna dance?

Is it my vanilla scent
Floodin' ya
Or
Our meltin' souls
puttin' ya in a trance?

Tell me
Mr. Brothaman
What brings ya back
My way?

Is it da shine in my hair
Or
Da swing in
My hips' sway?

Tell me
Mr. Brothaman
Why ya hunt my mind?

Is it da strength in
My touch
Or
Are da jewels of
My eyes
A rare find?

Tell me
Mr. Brothaman
This time
Do ya plan on stickin' 'round?
If not, ya best get ta poundin' da ground.

My Man

gotta picture of him
not in my wallet
but in my mind

this black
strong
gentleman
Son of God

King of Mine

taster of my wine

treats me as a
 Queen
 Divine

my man
sweet pomegranate kiss
chocolate
almond oil stare

love in ambrosia bliss

velvet touch of skin
on an ebony mare

rides smooth
bucking in my back

chills from wet kisses
grazed over shoulder
slopes

heated softness
bubbling in my gut
called flows of hopes

hopes for
a glimpse of
stability
security

maturity in his
masculinity
of sweet days
anniversaries
sexy thunderstorms
then lovemakin'
on lazy
Sundays

After Your Every Kiss

I'm diggin' you
And haven't a clue why
I'm trippin' over
One I don't know
I'm lustin' you
Like a ripe melon
On the hottest day
In Alabama
An' feelin' my best
These nights
Spent with you
 Wanna get drunk
 On your dark
 Juice dat's
 Forty proof
 Wanna turn
 My blood to
 Rivlets of lava
 Cuz
 To me you're like
 Dat bottle o'coke
 Dat up 'n popped outta
 Dat machine at da
 Old greyhound shack
 Of a station
 Last august
I can drink you
Like I did dat
Syrupy sweet
Carbon all
Bubblin' down
Thru me
Finally hittin'
Da bottom of
My stomach
 I want ya to be
 My sweetness
 Hush me with
 Your touches
 In your bliss
 Baby
 This is how I feel
 After your every kiss

Denison Days

Content on ramen noodles
I tolerate the lack of
Public transportation
Because there's no where to go around here
For a 'colored girl'
Like me
Anyhow

I glance out the window
Watch all the Barbies
Hop into all the jeeps
With all the Kens
Off to shake their asses
Drink till senseless
'N spread HIV

Another idiot pounds on my door
I listen to his feet
Scurry away
Before I can answer
(His mama must have never taught him
Creativity
So he could have found better ways to
Entertain himself)

They're lucky I ain't gotta gun.

Yeah, I like being called a woman
Only if they see the woman in me

A white girl cried in class last week
This bohemian lookin' dude called her a girl
She said
Call me a woman, we have come so far
I asked her point blank
Who are the "we" you talkin' bout?
What have you done to come so far?

Hushed.
A black woman put her in check

Once this girl asked me
If you hate it so much, why did you bother coming to college?
I said
Infiltration.

Oh, who said I hate it?
I just don't agree
And I let 'em know it.
I told her
Go read a book on Black Power
Then come talk to me.

She gave me that look
Any outspoken black woman is used to getting
You know
The one that pleads you
To allow them to remain
In the bliss of their own ignorance

Keepin' It Real?

You

Let 'em commodify your

Self

Let 'em buy your

Soul

---Off a block like O. Equiano

Let 'em shove you

D

O

W

N

Their dollar driven ass – embly line

Let 'em smack you

Upside da head

With a sticky, glue-backed label

That when retracted is 'gon

Peel off your

Skin

---Used to be cocoa rich

You

Let 'em edit your

Voice

Then RAPE the sanctity of your

Space

How could you commodify your

Self?

SCREAM

Just wanna scream
All y'all know
How I feel
Pissed off
Wanna scream
Don' cried 'nuff tears
Just wanna scream
It could
Be like music
A cacophony
All its own
Throw my head back
Stretch open
Pupils dilate
Ripplin' in my thighs
Vibratin' in my gut
Wash like a wave
Roll up and out
My throat
Mouth
Permeate air

My scream
Findin' its life
In its breath

Every Day

In your arms asleep I fall,
fall I, asleep. Arms, you're in
my soul pulling at the ears
that hear water and see

the reflection of the sky's
sweat that pours on them, rain

rain go away splish splat spat scream,
trickle pour off the roof shine the lightning

thunder hits the girl on the head, she fries
and dies while one plus one is two and
the square root of thirty-six is six so

I go see the black soul feast on some grits with
a hip hop doo whop on my way to Mass on

Sunday takes the Eucharist, pray that I
live to sin another day so that gods send me to where the water
streams in the volcano

where Pele stomps, shakes, steps
the one

two

one

two

PUNCH

of her dance to

the umpa um pa pa beat and
four times four is sixteen;

chew chew spit yum

I eat spam and nori under the rock where
we buried the dead tree yesterday
and said ten

Hail Marys

and ten

Our Fathers,

entwined our bodies in a blaze of fire
where you are salt like the water and I
am the weed that floats atop and through you

who see me clear through
the distorted glass, bent and curved
hit hit bash slammit on the floor
write equations on the wooden door,

*"the square root for the reciprocal of three thousand four hundred and forty-five is perhaps
twice the number of the integer that is before the numeral cincuenta y tres to the third power"*

where I took a splinter to fashion the Rod
so we could crucify God and let his
breath warm and chill us
as we lay at his feet
on the floor
under a silk blanket
twist
gasp

ahhhhhhhh
ooohhhh umph
 mmmmm
 I
 I
 I

I think I see Jesus,
yellow shining walking crying
holding the calculator He can't figure it out
and no one can because everyone's God.
He doesn't know that He made and
can't solve the mystery

of why its Tuesday morning and
waking up to your face feels just like Christmas.

-author unknown

Christopher Thomas

I would like to dedicate the following selections to my grandfather, Richard P. Holley. I remember on many occasions us casually sitting back and enjoying hearty meals either at Old Country Buffet or Hometown Buffet. Oh yeah, we had to dine in an establishment where we could definitely get our grub on. My grandfather was always a firm believer in exercising the true value of a dollar. We would frequently discuss different aspects of life. His words seemed to be clothed with valuable lessons as if they were in standard uniform. He would talk about relationships, how we treat our family, friends and lovers. Sometimes, people can possess a dangerous degree of affection for someone or something that may lead them to making irrational decisions. Perhaps, one can become extremely abusive to a lover. Or, a person can completely lose sight of all social and occupational obligations to simply *love jones* with their significant other. My grandfather use to tell me to always think things out first, and then do what I know is right.

Most of the pieces that I've provided illustrate the dangers of certain relationships. They include characters that have transferred their thought process to their incompetent mid-sections. There are also characters that devalue themselves in the process of lusting over others. Please enjoy...

"How We Treat People"

Contradictions

In the dark, frigid air we stand
holding hot cocoa and sweet tea.
Our words take the form of small clouds,
You complain constantly.
It's cold you say, like I don't know.
The flowers have long since died.
The birds are nowhere to be found.
We stand and wait for our ride.
Your actions are inconsistent.
Did someone hit you with rocks?
Your fleece seems warm and cozy.
Why do you have on shorts and flip-flops?

You boast of your healthy habits.
You preach our bodies' a temple.
It is the only one we'll have.
Maintaining it is quite simple.
You keep from junk food and beer.
Pork you say is destructive.
It is condemned by Allah,
That is not the way to live.
It's the cause of heart disease.
Eat it and you're a gona'.
You snatch my plate of pork chops,
But you smoke marijuana.

You are up Sunday morning.
Your tie's fixed and your shoes laced.
Your gold couplets are intact.
Bible in hand, no time you waist.
You anticipate greatness.
You hope to feel the warmth of Jesus.
The thoughts of him bring pure pleasure,
To glory he will lead us.
In the car you smile with joy.
Luke is what your tape deck plays.
Hands down, ass up, that's the way we
Like to . . . Mmm. What did he just say?

The Mad Chatter

I am fated with an invisible cord with one end tightly knotted around a belt-loop from my jeans,

And the other smoothly encircling her slender, goal-post waist she's bragged about ever since our early teens.

The bothersome conjunction begins at the sound of the bell announcing that forth period has come to an end and its time to feast upon fries, *Mr. Juicy's* and honey buns.

Within seconds of exiting Chemistry she hunts me down to flood my hearing basins with waves of gibberish splashing onto my *Nautica* jacket, demonstrating the magnificent power of her lungs.

Her jaws remain at a constant obtuse angle exposing her *Hershey* gums, tonsils, and the tissue that resembles a mini punching bag in the back.

Because of this I am all too familiar with the contours of her teeth, tinted yellow from her acquaintance with *Newports*, *Folgers*, and the bond with *Aquafresh* she lacks.

She has a chipped tooth. The story how it came to be I've heard on far too many occasions.

She tripped over her brother's GI Joe submarine and slammed her face up against the bed post one summer vacation.

Attempting to say grace before devouring the luscious treats of *Good N Plenty*

She boasts how she caught a sale at TJ Max for nylon panties.

While slurping up my orange *Mr. Juicy*, my favorite drink next to grape Kool Aid,

She informs me that her collie Cocoa has been quite ill and has had diarrhea for days.

She rambles on about how her older brother's fiancée is six months pregnant and the baby ain't his.

She can tell by the "heifer's" fake smile she thinks she better than *she* is.

She inquires how my day has been so that I will ask her the same.

Rapidly she proceeds to reveal highlights of her life and relate them to enough stories I've heard already to drive me nearly insane.

Apparently AJ asked for her number, but such a honor she claimed he was not worthy.

Too many of his teeth are MIA and his corduroys are always dirty.

An unfortunate garden accident left her Uncle Gus with only nine toes.

If her ex boyfriend's baby's mama's cousin disturbs her home with another prank call they'll soon come to blows.

Her neighbor's nephew was trippin' off acid and was doing the *Humpty* dance on the roof.

"By the way," she says, "let me tell you about the time I fell in my brother's room and chipped my tooth?"

I smile and listen patiently, for I consider her a good friend.

Silently I count down from 2000 until her marathon of reruns end.

April's Foolin' Ya

Because it was the first of April, Teddy Robinson bobbed down the hallway of his apartment complex with an unusual cherry expression on his face. His 260 pound frame, which stretched up to a near six feet, demanded space in the narrow hall. His size compelled passing residents to turn their bodies to the side to continue their stroll down the shining wood surface. His brown cheeks rounded as he smiled broadly. His dimples were vaguely visible because of his facial hair, which he kept neatly trimmed.

Teddy wore his thin Ralph Lauren jacket over his shoulder and his fitted New York Knicks cap turned to the side. He carefully held onto a large bottle inside a brown paper sack.

The hall smelled of ocean perch. Miss Rutherford in 307 must have been frying her special red snapper dish again. The blend of cayenne, bell peppers, onions, and a thick fishy odor leaked from under her door and swirled into the twin caverns of his nose. Teddy faintly heard a howling roll of laughter as he passed 304. Old man Johnson must have been watching a Richard Pryor movie, for that was the only time his soft voice found the strength to expand beyond the walls of his apartment. Teddy's neighbor Lenny, in 302, was practicing his trumpet. Lenny's blaring horn invaded the hallway with his version of *My Funny Valentine*, originally played by Miles Davis. Normally Teddy would have pounded on Lenny's door like the police and cursed him out for interrupting him from his Monday night NBA game. But Teddy could care less about Lenny and his music that particular evening. He was not planning on watching basketball that night, for it was a special night, even though his Knicks were playing the Bulls.

As Teddy finally reached his apartment, he dug into his pocket and pulled out a heavy, janitor size key ring. Holding onto his bottle tightly he slipped his door key into the knob with ease.

Teddy entered through the door and immediately clicked on the light switch. He was

welcomed by the gratifying scent of candles that had been burning hours ago. The apartment was spotless. That was hardly unusual. Teddy's girlfriend Diana, who lived with him, always kept the apartment in order. The Ebony magazines and Sports Illustrateds were neatly organized on the oak coffee table. The carpet had recently been vacuumed for the tracks made by the wheels of the Hoover were still vivid. The empty tall boys of Colt 45 and pulverized bags of pretzels and corn chips from Teddy's Sunday evening NBA get-together had been properly discarded.

Teddy approached the entertainment center and selected his preferred song from his Silkk the Shocker CD, which was already in the disc player. Seconds later the hard-core New Orleans sound of Silkk and Mystikal thundered throughout the room.

Ohhh it ain't my fault It ain't my fault

We can't stop now bitch

We can't stop

And you can't stop us

So bitch don't try

We TRU soldiers, we don't die

Teddy tossed his keys and his jacket onto the cream cushions of the couch and he placed his bottle to the side of the arranged magazines on the table. As he made his way to the telephone, he attempted to rap the first verse. He had memorized most of the words to the song for he heard it every time he went out to the clubs.

"I'm 'bout my paper, my paper

Important people on my pager

I might not drink Alizé

but I'll smoke you under the table

Don't make me peel your potato

Don't ma . . ."

Teddy ran out of air before completing half of the first verse. He was definitely no match to Mystikal's swift tongue, which rapidly formulated words so they could barely be understood.

"Godaaamn that boy can talk fast."

Teddy collapsed into his chair and began dialing his pager number to receive his voice mail messages.

"YOU HAVE THREE NEW MESSAGES. PRESS 3 TO PLAY OLDEST TO NEWEST. PRESS 4 TO PLAY NEWEST TO OLDEST."

Teddy instantly dialed 3.

"MESSAGE ONE Hi honey. This is your mother just callin' to wish my baby a happy birthday. I'm sorry I couldn't make it up to see you over the weekend but my knees still bothering me. I guess all of those years of chasing you and all your bad brothers around the house is catching up with me. Anyways, your father hasn't been up to anything special. Right now he is in the garage fixing that old, beat up Chevy of his. The one he has been tryin' to fix since Janet played Penny on *Good Times*. He says he's almost finished, like I haven't heard that 200 million times before. Well baby I'ma' let you go. I love you. I made you a cake. I'll send it up to ya soon as I can. Bye.

BEEP. MESSAGE TWO. Hey baby, I was just thinking about you. I miss you already. I really feel bad I couldn't be there with you on your birthday. I rented some videos to keep you out of trouble; *Superfly* and *The Return of Dolemite*. We'll celebrate when I get back Wednesday. Love you.

BEEP. MESSAGE THREE. Teddy Bear! Wasup? This yo partna man. You know we 'bout to live it up especially nice tonight for your birthday. I ain't gonna let you know what we doin' just yet. I'ma keep it as a surprise. Be at your place, ready, by 10:00. I'm forreal man, be

there. We ain't runnin' that CP time shit either. Put your playa gear on 'cause you know how we run thangs. Ha haah. I'm 'bout to make some calls right quick. I'll see you in a lil' while. Peace ba-be. BEEP. THERE ARE NO MORE MESSA . . ."

Teddy quickly hung up the phone and looked down at the time presented on the tiny screen of his pager. He figured he had about 45 minutes to get ready. "Damn." he cursed to himself. That was not much time at all. He did not even know what he was going to wear. He chuckled while glancing at the movies his girl had rented for him on top of the VCR. "Sorry baby. Not tonight."

Suddenly there was a knock at the door.

Teddy remained in his seat. "Come on in!" he shouted.

The door quickly opened and in walked Tanya, Teddy's neighbor from across the hall. The smell of fish from 307 and the sound of Lenny's horn crept into the apartment behind her.

"Ay, shut that door." Teddy quickly requested.

The thin milk chocolate woman briskly spun around to push the door closed.

"I'm sorry." Tanya smiled apologetically while turning back to Teddy. Her face suddenly began to harden. "He is loud as hell. I need to let that fool know that this is not amateur night at the Apollo and that some of us do have some studying to get done."

"Have a seat." Teddy said while pointing to the couch.

Tonya developed another smile as she slowly approached the couch. Her smooth legs screamed for attention as she moved ever so gracefully. Teddy's eyes watched carefully. He had always been attracted to Tanya but with her being friends with Diana he knew better.

"Thank you." Tanya said as she sat down and crossed her legs. "So where's Diana at?"

"She down south right now with her family. Apparently one of her cousins had asked her to be in her wedding at the last minute. So she left yesterday."

"Well, that was nice of her. Why didn't you go?"

"I don't do that last minute shit. Plus I already had plans."

"Oh really." Tanya laughed just before examining the bottle in the brown sack. "I'm being nosy. What you got in here? Oooh!" Her eyes expanded when she saw that it was a bottle of Moet. "You ballin' now?"

Teddy smiled. "That's to help me celebrate my birthday tonight."

"How old are you now?"

"25"

"Happy birthday to ya. I would sing for you but you know...."

"Oh no. Please don't sing."

"Nigga shut up. You was supposed to tell me to go head." Tonya laughed. "So what you gonna do tonight?"

Teddy hesitated for a moment. "Absolutely nothun'. I'ma sit here by myself and watch the movies my baby rented for me."

Tanya's mouth shot open and she exploded with laughter. "Whateva nigga. Don't lie. Don't even lie. I know you goin' out wit yo boys and y'all gonna drink, try to be players, and do what y'all do best, act ignorant."

"Nah, not me. See, how the media has corrupted your mind of the images of young black males. You watch too much TV."

"Whateva." Tanya laughed as she stood up and began to walk toward the door. "I'll see you later. Have fun tonight."

"Ay, holdup. Before you leave let me ask you a quick fashion question, 'cause you know I gotta' look good on my birthday. Should I go Boyz II Men, with my Tommy shirt, vest, and boots or should I just go Big Poppa style with the tan Versachi shirt, slacks to match, white

'gators, and white Godfather?"

"Versachi?!" Tanya smiled. "What day did you say Diana was coming back? Maybe I need to stay ova here tonight. Sike nah. What you need to dress up fo if you ain't going out?"

"I'm not going out. I just want to look good in case somebody stops by. You know, like my mom or someum."

"Boy, you're a mess. Save the Big Poppa look for when your girl comes back. Go with the Boyz II Men for now."

"Alright, sounds good. Thanks."

"Any time. I'll see you later then. Have fun." Tanya said before leaving.

Teddy finally stood up from his seat. He had already wasted too much precious time. He ran to his stereo to push stop. After momentarily silencing both Silkk and Mystikal in the apartment Teddy heard Tanya in the hall giving Lenny a piece of her mind.

"You need to cut that shit down, forreal!"

Teddy wanted to stay and listen to Lenny's response but he did not have the time. He quickly dashed to the bedroom where he could pick out his clothes and shower.

Teddy re-entered the front room just minutes before his friends were due to arrive. He glanced down at his Tommy watch and smiled with approval at his efficiency. The red face of his watch went with the many red horizontal and vertical lines that ran across his plaid long sleeved shirt.

With the excitement of what the night would soon become bubbling in his stomach, Teddy began to engage in a series of dance steps as he hummed the tune of a Michael Jackson classic. He moon-walked his way to the closest mirror so that he could admire his well designed attire.

He wore a red baseball cap with his first initial boldly patched in white on the front.

“Yousa’ pretty muuthafucka, you know that don’tchoo?” He wore two gold loops in each ear. A thick, diamond cut gold chain hung from his neck with a gold emblem of a bear’s head in the middle. His vest was beige and it also coordinated with the many colored lines of his shirt. His Jean shorts allowed his calves to be exposed so he could show off his Teddy Bear tattoo. “If I could, I’d even fuck you.”

Just then there was a knock at the door.

“Come on in!” Teddy shouted.

The woman on the other side of the door hesitated for a second but her thin fingers began to wrap around the brass knob and turned it to the right. She gave a slight push with her other hand and the door slowly crept open. She cautiously eased her head into the apartment. Her eyes scanned the front room. She was impressed with the cleanliness of the apartment. She quickly caught sight of the backside of Teddy’s massive frame.

Teddy had not even noticed his new visitor. He was too busy giving himself compliments on his looks as he eyed himself carefully in the mirror. Teddy wore a smile fit for Hollywood. His head bobbed to the imaginary tunes of the Michael Jackson song he had been humming earlier. “We gonna’ get some hoes tonight nigga,” he said while giving his reflection a hand gesture. “You look goood!”

The woman stepped completely into the room and softly closed the door behind her. She had to smile at Teddy’s self admiration. “You’re certainly not the conceded type.”

Teddy instantly looked up with a puzzled expression at the sound of the woman’s voice. After turning completely around his eye expanded at the ravishing sight that stood in front of him. His lips were unable to formulate any words, He swallowed hard and continued to stare. He appeared to have fallen in a pool of boyish shyness.

The woman’s skin was composed of a rich tone of honey. Her long, dark brown hair hung

halfway down her back. It was her almond-shaped eyes, which were of a light greenish tint, that ultimately made Teddy fall for her.

The silky black Donna Karan top she wore fit her tightly, defining all the curves of her large chest. Her firm stomach was partially exposed, leaving her silver belly ring visible. Teddy had a passionate fetish for belly rings. She wore a complimenting skirt of the same material as her top, which inched up well beyond the mid-point of her round thighs.

Teddy swallowed again and he was finally able to speak. "Can I help you?"

"Are you the birthday boy?"

Teddy smiled. He suddenly felt himself emerging to the surface above the waves of timidity. "Yes, that would be I."

Your friends sent me here. I'm an exotic dancer for Club Ecstasy. I'm here to give you a sample of what I do."

"Word?!" Teddy asked. "So when is Earl and nem gettin' here?"

"They'll be here shortly. In the meantime this show is strictly for you."

Teddy licked his lips and continued smiling. "I heard that."

"What kind of music do you have?"

"Aw, I got a lil bit of everything." Teddy said before pointing to the top of his entertainment system, where his massive collection of CDs was displayed. "They right ova there. Help yourself. I'm 'bout to run to the kitchen real quick and grab me a forty. You want anything?"

"No thank you." the woman answered as she casually made her way to the number of CDs neatly arranged in alphabetical order.

Teddy quickly disappeared to the kitchen.

Teddy's collection of CDs consisted of a wide range of music from jazz to reggae. The

selection made it hard for the woman to choose. She grinned brightly after finally finding the perfect CD. She quickly replaced Silkk the Shocker's *Charge It To The Game* with Prince and the Revolution's *Purple Rain*.

By the time Teddy had walked back into the front room gripping his ice cold forty ounce, the woman had shut off all the lights with the exception of a small black light in the corner. It rested on the large speaker laminating its purple rays, depicting extreme distortions in the color of surrounding objects.

As Teddy sat down on the couch and twisted the cap off of his bottle the slow beat of *Darling Nikki* began to flood the room. He took a huge gulp of the golden potion while the woman cleared the surface of the table.

The woman slipped out of her shoes before stepping onto the small oak piece of furniture, which became her stage. She stood directly in front of Teddy and her body began to sensually move to music

*I knew a girl named Nikki I guess you could say she was a sex
fiend*

I met her in a hotel lobby masturbating with a magazine

She said how'd you like to waste some time

And I could resist when I saw little Nikki grind

Continuing to dance to the rhythm of the song, the woman enacted a gradual about-face. Her knees bent low as her hands stroked the inner parts of her thighs in circular motions. Her backside was intentionally stuck outward toward teddy.

"Goddamn baby, you is fine as fuck." Teddy said before taking another swig of his brew.

She took me to her castle and I just couldn't believe my eyes

She had so many devices, everything that money could buy

She said sign your name on the dotted line

The lights went and Nikki started to grind

The woman's legs swayed from side to side. Her hands slowly eased further up her thighs, sliding her skirt up to reveal her G string panties.

"Oh my God!" This is one birthday I will not forget."

"I know."

"So baby what's your name? What do they call you?"

"Mystic."

"Mystic?" Teddy said strangely. "And why do they call you that?"

Mystic turned her body to face Teddy again. She held onto her breasts and continued to sway. "Because I have a mysterious way of doing certain things."

"Is that so?"

"Yelp."

Mystic's feet began to repel from each other as they slid across the wood surface. Her arms shot downward to maintain her balance. Her body lowered as her legs completely stretched out to her sides.

Short curly black hairs surfaced Mystic's long legs. Usually hairy women turned Teddy off but he had long since fell for the mysterious dancer before noticing.

"How old are you?"

"22," Mystic answered quickly just before swinging her legs back in front of her.

"How long you been dancing?"

"A couple of years."

"You like it?"

"It pays the rent."

"I heard that."

As Teddy continued to watch Mystic perform he sporadically tilted his bottle up to his lips so that he could drain the malt liquor down his throat. He noticed that with the exception of showing her panties, Mystic's show consisted of simply shaking her body parts and showing how flexible she was. He could watch the same thing on MTV. He was totally dissatisfied with the PG-13 exotic dancing. His impatience for nudity began to crack until he suddenly exploded. "Man, you buullshittin'. I wanna see titties, ass, and pubic hairs. All you doin' is dancing and shit."

"I'm not takin' shit off until your boy give me the rest of my money."

"How much he give you?"

"That nigga gave me fourteen dollars and a five dollar food stamp. That shit ain't gonna work here."

"You think you too good for that kind of money?"

"Look, I'm a professional, not some two dollar hoodrat shakin' titties just for kicks. I'm offering you a service and I expect to get paid."

"How much you talkin' 'bout?"

"I prefer Benjamin triplets."

"Three hundred bones! You must be sick in yo cranium. It's all about the Hamiltons baby."

"Not with me."

"Alright, listen. We're both adults here so I'm not even goin' to come at you weak. I'ma be real wit ya. I'm not concerned with your dance show."

"I can't tell."

"Let me finish. To be honest with you that was secondary from the start. You said you

ain't want to dance naked 'cause the chedda ain't right. That's cool. Like I said before I could care less about the dance. Baby your body is banging and right now you got me excited. This OE got me buzzin' and shit. I could game you fo about an hour and a half but that would only be wastin' precious time. Time in which I could be strokin'. You been here long enough to know whad I'm about. I'm simply tryin' to pursue drawls. So what's up? Won't you let a nigga slide through?"

Mystic continued to dance but with less energy than before. "I'm not getting naked."

Teddy twisted his lips with disappointment then took another swig of his brew. "Ay, there's a drink called Mystic. Which flavor is you?"

Mystic began to grin vividly. "Strawberry passion."

"Word? Let me taste it then."

Mystic leaked a light roll of laughter. "No."

"Let me smell it then."

"No."

"Let me bump into it on accident."

Again Mystic began to laugh. "Don't you have a girlfriend?"

"She ain't got shit to do with this. Stop trying to avoid my question. Stay focused on the subject at hand. This is about us, you and I. There's no third person involved."

"What makes you think I want to give you some of this here?"

"Personally I think you're just scared of a big nigga like myself. You think I'ma slip and wreck shop."

"That's not true. I like big men."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

Teddy placed his bottle onto the floor. "Lemme ask you somuem. What's the freakiest shit you ever did?"

Mystic finally discontinued her dancing. She slowly leaned closer to Teddy and began to give him a wet kiss.

As their lips met Teddy's eyes closed.

"You want me to show you?"

Teddy's eyes remained closed. "Yeh."

"There's something I must tell you first."

"Go head then."

Mystic hesitated. "I used to be a guy."

Teddy's face stiffened and his eyes immediately shot open. "What the fuck you say?!"

Mystic sensed that it would be best for her safety if she was to leave. She quickly stood to her feet. "See, why are you trippin'?"

"Why am I trippin'?! You mean to tell me you don't know the fucking answer to that question?! That's some fucked up shit you just did! I'm 'bout to crack yo fuckin' forehead!"

Suddenly the front door crashed open and Teddy's friend Earl quickly entered. He raced toward Teddy to prevent him from taking any drastic actions.

"Teddy Bear. Calm down man. It's alright. Calm down." Earl pleaded.

"Man how the fuck you gonna send him, her, or whateva the fuck, ova to the crib to strip fo me." Teddy exploded. "I should crack your fuckin' forehead too!"

"Ted man, calm down. Just listen. Listen man!"

"Alright I'm listening. What?!"

"April Fools."

"Nigga I already know she used to be a dude!"

"No no no. Listen man. That was the joke man. She never been no dude. This is my cousin Shennel from Chicago. Man, we were just clownin' you."

"Then what about them woolly ass legs."

"Man that don't mean shit cause yo mama got hairy legs and thick ass Elvis sideburns."

"All right. I guess you're right. You got me."

"Come on and grab your stuff so we can head to this 'till and celebrate your birthday."

The three began to gradually make their way to the door.

Teddy turned to Earl's cousin, Shennel, and smiled. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to question your womanhood. Its just, I was watchin' Jerry Springer the other day and I . . ."

Shennel laughed. "That's all right. You don't have to explain anything. I understand."

"I think your legs are extremely sexy." Teddy continued. "But back to what we were chattin' about earlier. You can still let a nigga slip in that shit."

"A man!" Earl interrupted. "I told you that's my cousin."

The Journey

Majunie and Whykel slowly strolled into the largest room of the club. As the two continued forward, across the rough, gritty surface, the blend of lagging violin strings and rapid intervals of beats in Busta Rhyme's *Gimme Some More*, took dominion over their stretched, thin bodies. Their heads bobbed obediently to the music.

Whykel raised his drink to his lips with one hand and he elevated his free hand up above his shoulder, where it swayed loosely with the beat. After the stream of gin and juice made it down his throat and warmed his stomach, he cursed loudly, confessing his devotion to the song for all to hear.

Majunie had expected his friend's outburst, for he knew that he was very passionate about music. In fact, Whykel lectured daily about the negative effects of rap groups feeding off of classic R&B cuts from the seventies to generate new ones. He called this the Puff Daddy effect. However, when he came across a rap song that he liked with some originality, he quickly grew attached. He consistently erupted every time Busta Rhyme's song came. On one occasion, Majunie had to quickly calm his friend while they were watching *Rap City* because his grandfather was just in the other room, studying Ephesians.

The two towering figures gradually came to a stop after nearing a set of tables. Neither one of them were sure if they wanted to sit down or ease forward a few additional steps to the dance floor.

Majunie took advantage of their paused progress. He stretched his head over his shoulder and bent his right leg back so that he could get a look at the bottom of his Jordans. The club was dim and he did not have the slightest clue to what he had been stepping on. Majunie carefully examined the rigid, rubber surface of the monstrous shoe. He saw that it was clean so he laid his foot back down and quickly checked the other. He swore to himself that if there was any gum or

any other disgusting substance carelessly dropped by some trifling individual, he would truly show his color. He was pleased that he did not have to because his left shoe cleared the inspection also.

Majunie had gone through too much trouble to obtain possession of the \$145 pair of shoes that dressed his giant feet. Ever day for two weeks, he drove all the way out to the other side of Columbus to the Foot Locker in Westland mall. His friend Omar had promised him an extremely reasonable price for the shoes, which was the only motivation he needed to make the forty-minute drive. Majunie was repeatedly faced with agonizing disappointments. Every time he showed up his friend would nervously tell him to come back the next day because of his paranoia of the manager catching on to their scheme. After Majunie's cross-city visits had reached double digits, he lost hope. He figured the discount would be pointless, for he felt he had paid the difference in gas money. He finally decided to go to his last resort and call up the girl next door, who had been obsessive about him since the third grade. In exchange for her buying his shoes, he had to actually spend some time with her and act as if he enjoyed it.

Whykel tapped Majunie on the back and pointed to a young, honey-toned woman sitting alone at a table. Majunie nodded his head slightly to show his comprehension as his friend departed to pursue the woman.

Majunie took a swallow of his E&J and Coke and quickly scanned the room. The dance floor consisted of many open gaps between the bodies rhythmically moving close. That was unusual. Never before had he been able to see the other side of the room so clearly. Suddenly he saw her.

He was not quite sure of her name. He knew it started with a R. It was not Rachel or Rashada. He was sure it was not Roslyn. Majunie pondered tensely to recall the name inscribed on the small yellow nametag of Best Buy's most ravishing employee. Her beauty could qualify

her to dance in a music video. If it was Majunie's choice that it would be an uncensored Luke video, but he could tell by just the brief verbal changes he had with her that she had class.

She always wore her hair nice. It streamed down to her chest like pouring black coffee. Her smile was so delicate and angel-like.

Raven was her name. A grin emerged from Majunie's face as it lit up in bold letters in his mind. He watched her as she stood against the wall, casually conversing with a group of female friends. In the past he never could seem to muster up the confidence to ask for her number. He continued to eye the beige princess from the other side of the room and decided that nothing stood in his way. The open alleys between dancers appeared to widen even more as he continued his stroll.

With ease Majunie maneuvered around energetic couples and he began to feel the effects of the alcohol. Suddenly he was grabbed from behind by the hefty woman who urged him to dance. Before he could come with an excuse to why he could not, she quickly pushed her large frame onto his, diminishing what little space had stood in between the two. The large woman held Majunie tightly as she grinded her lower body sexually onto his.

Majunie stretched his neck to see if Raven was still in her spot. His heart warmed when he saw that she was. His eyes slowly swung back to the full-figured woman that reminded him of the McDonalds's character Grimis. Seeing that he had little choice, he decided to conform and to make his super-sized value meal partner's night, and dance. After all, he knew she would be getting tired soon.

To his surprise she lasted through two songs. However, she was drenched with perspiration and she was not *Sure*. The steamy odor crawled through his nostrils and inflamed his nose hairs. The look on her face suggested she badly needed to sit. He breathed heavy and her lip hung low. Majunie felt it was his opportunity to flee. She was weak, and she definitely did not

have the energy to catch him. His smile suggested his satisfaction and he quickly escaped.

Majunie made is way around more dancers only to find that Raven and her friends had moved. He knew she could not have gone far. Frantically he turned to find her. In the process he bumped into a short, bald man, who spilled his Long Island ice tea all on Majunie's Jordans.

The Nappy Trap

Damn. Why don't this chick hurry?!

Ramone sunk into the springless, off-white couch. She had definitely set him up by having him wait for her on the shabby piece of furniture. The awkward position in which he was in, forced his knees up near his chest. He cursed at the worthlessness of the cushion he sat on. It served about as much comfort as an armless masseuse. He finally understood the discomfort women experienced when sitting down on the toilet with the seat up. He felt at any moment he was going to sink all the way in.

While waiting, he studied the surface of the cushioned commode. He was not quite sure if it was naturally cream colored or if it was the result of years of sweaty, uncleaned bodies shedding the dirt they accumulated during the day as they lounged. He knew the red stains shaped like continents were not part of the original design. *Should have kept that plastic covering on like other Black folks.*

Ramone thought about the faint musty odor that arose from the couch. He imagined one of her kids carelessly tipping over a glass of Kool Aid. He could distinguish the stench of pee that slowly drifted into his nasal caverns. An image of the woman's three-year-old making rain where he currently sat, suddenly flooded his mind.

The cheap vanilla scented air-freshener recently sprayed worked about as well as the cushion Ramone rested on. The air was foul with the 2 year old's diaper and garlic chicken from the night before.

The woman's disorderly bunch of midgets ranted what few curse words they could make out. They threw toys and picked their noses as if it was their profession. Ramone nearly choked when the oldest one asked if he was going to be their new daddy.

What the fuck that girl doin' up there, takin' a shit?!

The combination of the loud, wild voices of the kids and the blaring television set orchestrated a stinging tune that almost burnt his ears. He wanted badly to kick the four-year-old, but he did not feel it would be proper. He also wanted to cut off the TV, but did not know if he could get up.

Ramone thought about the woman he was waiting for. He had just met her a week earlier at a gas station. She actually approached him. He agreed that it was a strange place to meet someone, but he was struck by her figure, which blurred his conscious efforts to remain faithful. Matter of fact, he had forgotten exactly what she looked like in the face until he showed up at her apartment. She definitely seemed to have the body of a model but he wanted to see for himself. He knew clothes could be deceiving at times.

She appeared fairly nice on the phone, although the conversation was rather weak. She shared many of the same interest as Ramone. To his surprise, she liked football and was a big Cleveland Browns fan. She even listened to Miles Davis. However, Ramone was not interested in any kind of serious relationship with her, for he was already with someone else. He could tell the woman he came to visit was a chickenfeed, therefore could never be his main lady. Plus she had too many kids. She could only hope to fill the position of second string, a backup for whenever his number one was acting stupid.

On the small coffee table Ramone noticed a gold envelope with his name inscribed with red magic marker. *Huh?* He extended out his arm and quickly grabbed it. He dipped his hand inside and pulled out a photograph he was well familiar with.

The picture had been taken a year ago during a trip he and his girlfriend, Mona, took at Disneyland. The two smiled broadly as they posed in front of a large fountain. Mona held onto the stuffed Winnie the Pooh bear her man had bought. Ramone was clean-shaven at the time. A set of Mickey Mouse ears sat on his head, complimented with his kid-like grin. He comforted

Mona in his arms as he rested his chin on her shoulder.

Ramone flipped the photo over. There he found a small note stuck on the back that read *busted*. "Oh shit."

Mona entered the room with a baseball bat. "My friends tried to tell me you wasn't nothin but a dog, but I didn't want to believe them. Now I'm 'bout to whip yo ass fo fuckin' wit me!"

"Wait baby! Please!" Ramone jumped to his feet. "I can explain."

The girl that he had been waiting for made her way down the steps and lightly began to chuckle.

Mona turned briefly to the woman. "Lock the door Christina," she ordered while redirecting her focus on Ramone. "I'ma'beat this nigga' like Rodney King."

Laila McCloud

All praise is due to GOD from whom all blessings flow.

The poems you are about to read echo a few of my life experiences. They are a reflection of some of the exciting and miserable times in my life—my first love, the birth of my niece, and life at Denison University. I'm very happy that **Black Rage** has given me the opportunity to express my innermost thoughts with you, the reader. Hopefully you will read these poems and find a small part of yourself and smile knowing that there is someone else out there that feels the same as you. On a personal note, I would like to thank everyone that has been *real* and *consistent* with me since my arrival on this campus. You don't know how much it meant to me to have individuals who were willing to listen to me and try to understand what I was feeling. Denison has been a very difficult place for me to get use to but the love from you has kept me going. I have learned that I can't expect any more from people than they are willing to give. Certain people have given me more and I hope that I have been respectful and given back.

"Experience Reciprocity"

A Beautiful Thing

His love has touched my soul
Made diamonds out of coal
Wiped my tears away and refined me
He held me when no one else would
He loved me when no one else could
Lifted me up with wings
And took me to experience
All those beautiful things
A love like this can't be found
Just anywhere
Too many weren't willing
To take this dare

Opening up my heart is never hard
Too easy do I lay out my cards
But he never took my weakness and ran
He was patient and waited with a plan
He believed in me and what
I am
Listened to my feelings as only
He can

No one has touched me the way he has
He has made me realize parts of me once past
He has opened my eyes
To sights once blurry
And I love him

Restless

Sometimes when I can't sleep
I think of you
I don't remember your face
Just the outline of your body
I saw you move as if to wave good-bye

Sometimes when I can't sleep
I think of you
All these words come to my mind
If I had the chance this is what I would have said
I love you

Sometimes when I can't sleep
I think of you
Holding you would be ideal
Knowing you are a reflection of me
Knowing your existence was not a dream

Sometimes when I can't sleep
I think of you
My pillowcase gets damp with tears
My eyes get blurry and red
Your presence overwhelms me
You consume my thoughts
Until my body becomes heavy
Then I know you're in a better place
And I fall asleep

Jennah Melisse

(mi sobrina)

I remember the first time I saw you
You didn't know I was watching you
And you turned your back
Yet I was anxious to see you and waited
Then one early August morning we met
For the first time
This time I touched your hand
And looked into those gray eyes
You've been my favorite ever since

In Arabic your name means paradise
And you've brought nothing
But joy into my life
One of the first words you uttered was my name
"La-la"

It brought tears to my eyes
In the words of Lauryn Hill
"Now let me pray to keep you from the perils that will surely come."

Long Way From Home

Never before have I felt so alone
Caught in this place I can't call home
I'm lost in a maze searching for an end
Come to realize I don't know where to begin
Hurting inside but afraid to talk
Looking for anyone, with me they will walk
I can't describe the pain I feel
Sometimes I wish my experience wasn't real
Just a dream from I'll wake up
Turns out I'm like glue between two pieces of paper, stuck
I'm not use to this helpless feeling
What I need is some emotional healing
Something to help me make sense of this mess
But in the end I'm still here, God bless

I'm not as happy as I use to be
Being here has taken so much from me
Many nights I've spent crying
With each tear I felt parts of me dying
My strength has stolen from my muscles
I fought constantly to get it back but lost the scuffle
I want to get up and not give in
But every time I look in that direction I doubt I'll win
Unfortunately I'm down and blue
Trying to figure out this complex puzzle without a clue
Silently wishing someone will hear my cry
Not wanting to call out, I watch as they pass me by
They don't know the agony that races in my mind
They all charge ahead leaving me behind

It's okay
I'll stay
I'll pray
I'll find a way
Hope that every morning my eyes open to see another day
In that I'll find comfort and ease
Every minute I'll be lifted from my knees
The warmth of truth will see me through
It covers me sweetly like fresh dew
Turning my head to the east
Upon the fruits of my people I will feast
Remind myself of the greatness from which I came
Realize that this situation can change

Rise up
Stand up
Get up
And be proud
Wipe my sadness away
Get rid of that ugly cloud
This place do I hate
However this position I'm in now is not my fate
Although I can't return to my natural place
I will create another in which I feel safe
Satisfied
No
But I've come a long way

Ceara Nicole Flake

My, my, my....Lawdhav'mucy...Oooh Sweet Jesus at five o'clock in the morning.

Ode to write poetically, powerfully, entrancing curious eyes with word-filled emotions—
what's your secret, potion? Voodoo, oh no, not me, I stay true. Waiting on the voice of my
Heavenly Father, listening, looking for cypheric episodes, engaging dialogues. I pick up a pen,
careful to place it poignantly on mi la papél, what's that smell? Sweet scents of liberty... Oh, I
see, you want to seduce me with your intellectual catastrophes, hypotheses. Well, let me tell you
this one thing—I have the answer, I know where the secret treasure lies, I understand why The
Real Woman Warrior writes...she gotta survive!

“I Know Why The Real Woman Warrior Writes”

Love knows no limits
When I'm holding you
My fingers tightly intertwined around
Your thin frame
We make melody so true
Though words unspoken
They leave marks profound
Through poetry created
Stroke by stroke
As we tumble
Through sheets white as snow

At times I fear you
Though you bring me hope
To live life through our found love
But I know
Like my last love
You too will run out
Am I forever doomed to fickle love?
Maybe you'll stay
But my soul is in doubt
An outlet I need
Sent straight from above

I only have three more chapters to write
I'll die if you run out of ink tonight
Paper Mate

She Made Me Be

(for Ma (mother) Soror (sister) Dr. (teacher) Betty Lovelace)

 Hmm. I thought... A real woman warrior standing in my midst.
Beautiful and brown with a kinky crown layed just right
Incredibly intuitive...intelligent...full of insight

 A real woman warrior. Gotta be.
Went from a perpetual exhale to a simple sigh in one life-time
 Sister, Soldier, Mother, Motivator—hard to define
 A real woman warrior. No doubt.

Knows that negotiation is necessary
Manipulation is nonconformity
And a strong will makes you free

 Hmm. I thought... A real woman warrior is what I want to be.
I marveled at this black woman
 Towering over me
For she had awakened
 The real woman warrior
Lying dormant in me.

Like That

(for Audrey Townsel, my best friend)

They say friends come

A dime

A dozen

I say since when

Can you get a friend

Who has your back

Through thick and thin

A friend that has been there

Since

"Down In The Valley"

"Miss Mary Mack"

And all that smack

Since

Running track

And

Hangin' with Lil' Black

Cuttin' class

And

Actin' fass

Since

Beale Street Blues

And

Makin' moves

With hoopers and hustlers

And all types of busters

Since

Prom night

And

Runnin' the streets

With Elycia Wilhite

And

Midnight flights

On graduation night

Since

College admissions

Dormitory decisions

Being on line

And

Crossin' the sands

Into AKA land

Since when
Can you get a friend
Like that
For a dime
Since friends like that
Only come
Once in a lifetime

**Epiphany
(for Paul)**

Sweet strawberries, honey dew melon, grapes to grow on
In front of next to behind on top of underneath some
More sweet stuff

Solid gold copper tone platinum plus brass coins
Wrapped rolled in concentration with some
More solid stuff

True words of life death love left to ponder upon
Written in secret diaries to be locked by hidden keys with some
More true stuff

Unknowingly
Packed sealed hidden—was
My love
Or

Precisely
Positioned pressed concealed—was
My love
Then you

Indulged in sweet delectables and
Invested in wealth secured and
Interpreted words unspoken or
Maybe you

Ate sweet delectables and
Took wealth secured and
Found the key and
I discovered the truth

Spit Some'n
Spit Some'n!
Spit Some'n!
Shouted the crowd
As the Lady Poet
Stood Proud

Oh, you thought I was gon' rhyme
For a nickel and a dime
Nigga please
I'm the Poet Laureate of all timez

I need some'n mo'
Some'n I can feed off of
Some'n straight forward metaphoric
Profound

A sound that awakens
The bowels of my inner being
Baby I'm talkin' bout that ole
Sunday morning Mother Walker's gon' say a word to the saints
Call to the mic-
Rophone

A tone that'll excite the
Prolific creativity
That now lies dormant
From your simplistic unrealistic
Demands for performance

Spit some'n

How could I possibly
Spit
Some'n proliferated from the mind
Of a fragmented female
Blackened by the tales of time

Awh yeah...

Spit some'n!

By and By

The struggle continues
Struggle
What struggle?
The struggle to be.
To be Black in America.

America
My country tears of thee
Sweet land of liberty
Land where my fathers died
On back sides of Mississippi roads,
On south sides of ghettos in Chicago,
In front of the horrified eyes of sons and daughters,
Leaving Black mothers behind
Mothers that wept and wailed tears of pain and sorrow
Sorrow so deep so wide only her eyes
Could give voice to pain
Pain that penetrates the very preponderance
Of this system of oppression that we
We, us, us, you and me have been defined and confined by

By, yes, by
Ooh, I can hear Big Momma, Nanna, Ma' Dear hummin' right now
By and by
By and by
We're gonna make it somehow
By and by
Yes, we are gonna make it
Make it over
Over to the other side
The other side of the Euphrates, Nile, Mississippi
Yes, I've known rivers too.
To the other side where we can freely be
Black
Black like me
Black like you
Black like Nat Turner without the knife
Black Like Ida B. who lived in nonconformity
Black like Fannie Lou who got up
From sharin' the crop to boggartin' the top
Black
Black like Martin Luther without two cheeks
Black like that

To be Black like that
Is to be free
To be free, we must be—conscious.
Spiritually and politically conscious
Conscious of the fact that we were not meant to be
Be Black like that
Conscious of who we are inside
Inside of this westernized frame of mind
That alternates, acculturates or completely assimilates
Our very will to be—Black
Conscious of the fact
That we are but three generations removed
From the Great Revolution
The revolution where our mothers and fathers
Risked their lives to be
To be on a bus without being forced to the backside
To be in a school without books two decades behind
To drink, eat, live, work everywhere we take for granted now

Now is the time to remember.
Remember that the struggle continues.
It continues in crowded classrooms all across this country
Where poor Black kids are deprived
Deprived of the advanced education that others receive by unparalleled privilege
It continues in crooked courtrooms where Brothahs are sent behind bars for crimes uncommitted
It continues in big corporations where Sistahs are discriminately denied raises and promotions
Into high places

The Struggle
Yeah, it does continue.
So while you and I sit here
Here in this lily-white field of privileged pleasure
We must not forget
That the struggle continues.

Now What Is We Gon' Do?

This is a call

To my

African American brothahs and sistahs

Not meant to disrespect

Or disregard

All others

Simply aimed at mobilizing

Those most directly affected by

The Struggle

With that in mind

I ask YOU

My beautiful Black brothahs and sistahs

NOW WHAT IS WE GON' DO?

What is we gon' do

Since

The picketers have packed up their posters

And

Placed their babies in integrated schools

Cuz

It seems like the battle is over

Now that

Bull O'Conner has put his dogs away

And

Governor Faubus finally let the "Little Rock Nine"

Attend Central High

Now

That's all good and fine

But

Cleared smoke in the streets of Harlem, Watts

And

No more bombs in Birmingham

Don't

Excuse crooked courtrooms that

Systematically claim the souls of innocent brothahs

Strippin' black mothahs

And

Black children of their provision, protection

And

Love.

Token Uncle Tom appointees to
Menial government positions
And
A few good ones
Don't
Make up for an educational system
That
Strategically works to murder the spirit of Black children
From the time they set foot in a kindergarten classroom
To
Accepting a so-called distinguished degree
Of
Higher Education.

Contemplation
Leads me back

To
That great dream of a great King
That
We all know so well

*"I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed:
'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.'
I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood."*

That's what we remember him saying
On
The steps of Lincoln's Memorial
In
Our nation's capital, August 28, 1963

We remember the dream
Cuz
All the history books, documentaries and memorials
Only
Allow us to revisit
THE DREAM

Rarely does society recall
The reality revealed before the dream
When
He, standing on the steps of Lincoln's Memorial
In

Our nation's capital, August 28, 1963
So gallantly said:

"In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

So, I standing here at Denison University
Fair college on the hill
Ask YOU
My brothahs and sistahs
Now what is we gon' do?

What is we gon do
Since
That great dream of a great King
That
We all know so well
Or
Thought we knew so well
Lies dormant
Decaying on the steps of Lincoln's Memorial
Cuz
The dreamer has been misinterpreted or misconstrued
Whichever way
His dream is definitely misunderstood

Don't be fooled
The promised land exceeds the freedom of a select few
Just me and you
Don't make up for others
That
Didn't make the quota
Or
Fit the bill
Let me break it down and keep it real

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream
That has not been fulfilled

So once again,
I ask YOU,
Now what is we gon' do?

Contributors

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